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## Old Dongola: Kom H

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## OLD DONGOLA

### KOM H

#### Stefan Jakobielski

Excavations in the northwestern part of the Monastery (so-called Western Annex) on Kom H<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1) covered an area of 12 x 7 m, comprising the southeastern corner of Building NW-S, the area to the south including the south facade, and Room 35 shaped as a kind of semicircular projecting bastion, and a former yard (Room 19), all cleared to the paving level. The uncovered rooms were barrel-vaulted and provided with a paving either of terracotta tiles (Rooms 19, 27, 28B, 35) or small irregular slabs of stone (Room 29, 31). In Room 30, which apparently does not belong to the same building, only the upper strata from the Terminal Christian period were excavated, revealing the domestic nature of the occupation. Rooms 28B (originally accessible from Room 30) and 28A (situated alongside 28B) were of special character and were used most probably only from the upper storey as a kind of cellar accessible solely through square openings made in the floor. In 28A, which is preserved in toto, there are also two openings for ventilation in the form of pottery tubes fixed into the vault and closed with pottery plugs (one preserved in place). Both rooms are situated on a level c. 2 m higher than the original floor of the building. The floor in Room 28B was of square terracotta tiles; that of Room 28A was of compact mud. Both rooms were turned into rubbish dumps in the Terminal Christian period. Several interesting objects were found in the refuse, including a nearly completely burnt parchment book in Old Nubian with only fragmentary

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<sup>1</sup> For previous reports see: S. Jakobielski, *PAM IV*, 1992 (1993), pp. 102-106; *PAM V* 1993 (1994), pp. 115-126; *PAM VI*, 1994 (1995), pp. 84-92; *PAM VII*, 1995 (1996), pp. 105-113; *PAM VIII*, 1996 (1997), pp. 161-168.

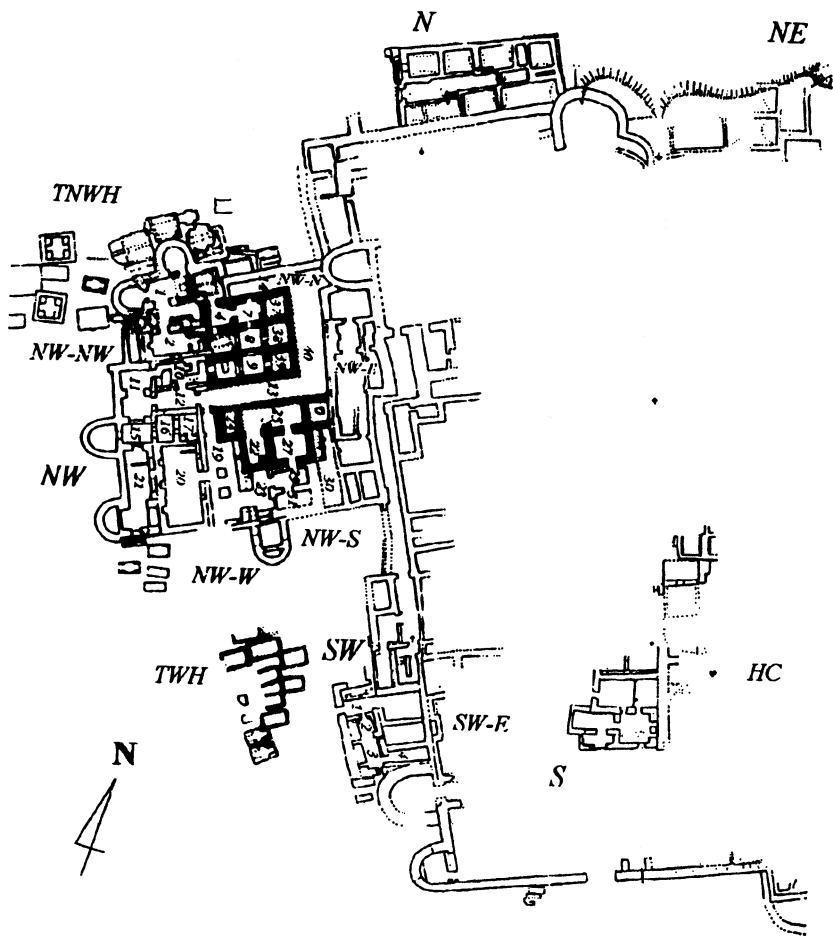
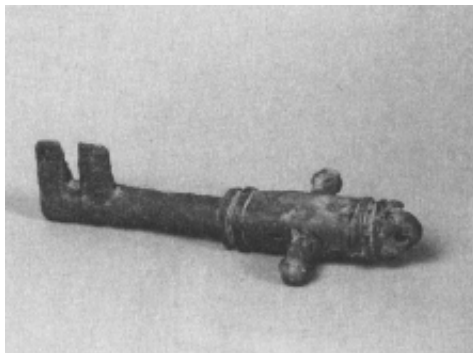


Fig. 1. Western Annex abutting the Monastery (the earliest buildings NW-N and NW-S distinguished by plain contour).  
Drawing A. Wójcik and K. Pluskota.

sheets surviving untouched by the flames. The codex apparently contained a selection of the Psalms. Also some metal objects were found, including an enormously big iron key with

a bronze handle (Fig. 2), an amulet with magic texts in Coptic scratched on the lead sheet; an iron bit and other fragments of horse harness, as well as an iron hinge complete with a set of nails. In the neighboring Room 29, in the rubble, a small bronze icon with an incised representation of a saint was discovered.



*Fig. 2. Iron key with bronze handle.  
Photo T. Ryszewski.*

On the whole, little can be said about the function of individual rooms on the ground-floor of Building NW-S, but excavations remain to be completed (a row of rooms: 24, 25, 26, situated alongside the north facade of the building, still need to be cleared). Even so, certain observations concerning the function of individual rooms can be ventured, and may possibly be of aid in analyzing the layout of this part of the Western Annex and its architectural development.

Room 29 (3.50 x 1.60 m) accessible through an archway from the entrance hall (Room 23, excavated in the previous season) could not have been used for anything but communication purposes, considering that it had arched doorways at either end, the north and the south, leading to rooms 27 and 31. The only one without a doorway, the eastern wall is covered with a huge painting that extends onto the side walls; it is a representation of Christ on the upper part of the wall and, below, an Archangel protecting a Nubian nobleman (Figs 3 and 4). The Twelve Apostles accompany the Archangel (six figures on the south and the north walls

respectively). In this part of the room, there is also a square structure, built of brick against the east wall, suggesting a place suitable for liturgical service. On the south wall, a large ink inscription is preserved, containing a fragment of the intercessio in Greek (viz. a prayer for the Church) from the liturgy of the Holy Mass. Hence, it is presumably a small chapel that is involved in this case. On the north wall, beside a small painting of an Angel, there is yet another inscription - Psalm 97 (96), each verse in two languages alternately, in Greek and Old Nubian. Psalm 128 (127) was written on the south wall of Room 31 in the same manner.

Room 31 (3.60 x 1.70 m) has no furnishings. It might be significant, however, that the wall paintings are restricted to representations, on the east and the south walls, of local bishops protected by Archangels. Originally, the room was accessible also from the entrance hall through an arched doorway, which was later blocked with a thin screen wall to create a kind of niche in the east wall of the hall (Room 23). The text of the Creed (discovered last season)<sup>2</sup> was written inside it. Then the only entrance with a painting of Christ Emmanuel embellishing the arch (Fig. 4) gave access to Room 31 from Room 29. In the last phase, the room underwent a curious rebuilding, the purpose of which remains obscure. Apparently, a roof on wooden beams was introduced inside it, at a height of barely 1.20 m above the pavement.

In analogy to the southern part of the vestibule (23), the two rooms described above adjoined an older part of the building, which was founded on a slightly higher level. Only Room 27 (3.60 x 2.40 m) belonging to this earlier phase of the building (situated to the east of the northern part of vestibule 22) was excavated this season. After the rebuilding, it was furnished in a way that most certainly identifies it as a cell: along the western wall there

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. S. Jakobielski, A. Łajtar, Bin Glaubensbekenntnis aus Alt Dongola (Sudan), *JJP* (in print) and *PAM* VIII, 1996 (1997), p. 166.

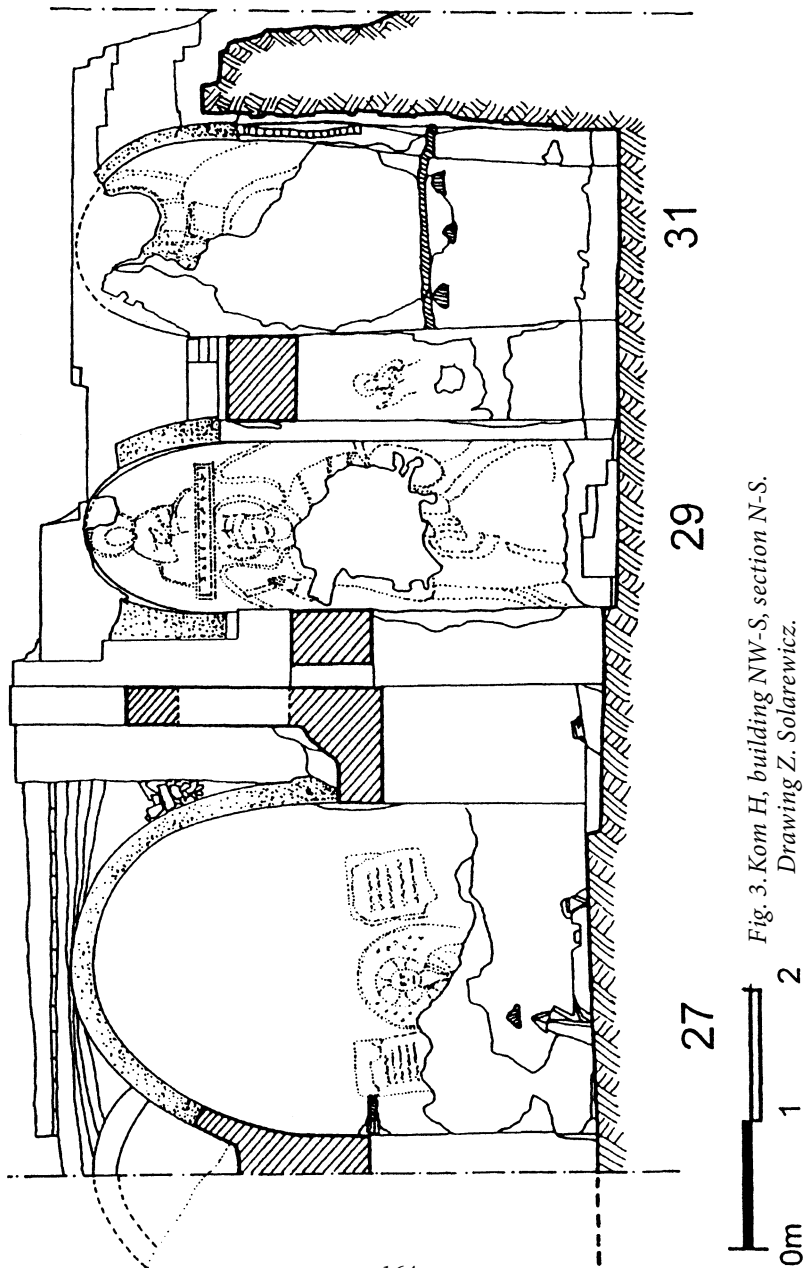
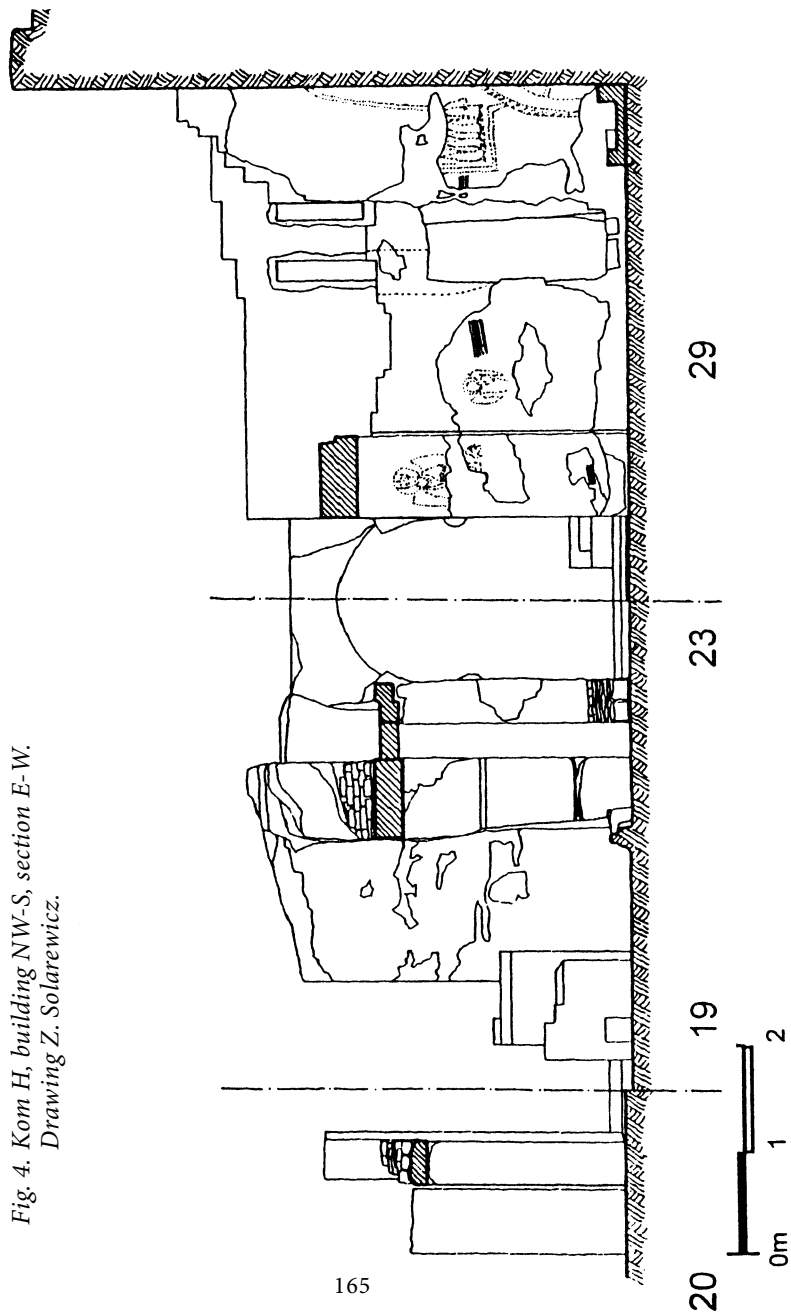


Fig. 3. Kom H, building NW-S, section N-S.  
 Drawing Z. Solarewicz.

Fig. 4. Kom H, building NW-S, section E-W.  
Drawing Z. Solarewicz.



is a tiled mastaba-like bed with headrests at both ends; at the east wall with a mural representing a bust of *Christ in tondo*, there is a square structure that is suitable as an altar (Fig. 4); in the north-eastern corner, there is triangular shelf with a saucer lamp still in position. The only problem with such an identification is constituted by the low and wide archways on either side of the room, giving passage from Room 29 to 25 (not excavated yet); passages of the kind are not usually encountered in cells. Another feature which seems to contradict the identification is the complete liturgical text of the *oratio oblationis* in Greek written on either side of the painting of Christ; this text can be used only when the Holy Communion is being given exceptionally on an ordinary day of the week, instead of the Sunday service that was the common practice of the church in this period.<sup>3</sup> The original function of Room 27 before the rebuilding is even more difficult to establish because no inner constructions are extant. Further excavations of the remaining northernmost part of the building, planned for the next season, could solve perhaps the problem of identification. It is striking, however, that the program of the interior decoration comprises most of the iconographical themes traditionally used in Nubian Church buildings, which may suggest that a chapel arranged in Room 29 might have possibly dictated the choice of scenes in the whole complex.<sup>4</sup>

A recent hypothesis has the whole Northwestern Annex to the Monastery being used from the 12th century as a *Xenon*

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<sup>3</sup> A similar text, as well as an altar and a painting of Christ above it, was previously found in the Western Annex in Room 7. Cf. S. Jakobielski, K. Pluskota, B. Żurawski, [in:] *Kush XVI*, pp. 294, 315; for the text, cf. A. Łajtar, Greek inscriptions from the Monastery on Kom H [in:] *The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism*, Kraków-Tyńiec 1995, p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Martens-Czarnecka, Provisional identification of the function of individual rooms of the Monastery on Kom H, [in:] *Journal of the Polish Nubian Society I* (Gdańsk), in print.



(a Byzantine institution which was a combination of hospice and hospital),<sup>5</sup> where treatment was intensified thanks to the proximity of the burials of the Holy Men (which is indeed the case here). Another less probable hypothesis is that the Annex included an episcopal residence, perhaps of Bishop Georgios himself.

A dedication by Georgios on the mural on the east wall of Room 29 seems to date the rebuilding of structure NW-S rather precisely to the middle of the 11th century.<sup>6</sup> The decoration of the interior was completed in the 12th century, to judge by the stylistic features of the murals. After AD 1113, when Georgios' crypt was incorporated into the Northwestern funerary complex, the whole Annex underwent another rebuilding, which seems to have affected the Building NW-S as well. Barrel-vaulted Room 19 was introduced in the place of a former yard in front of the main doorway to the building and a semicircular structure (Room 35) was built to the south of the vestibule.

Works in the building necessitated intensive conservation treatment, concerning mostly the walls and murals. Urgent intervention was required in Rooms 29, 31 and 19, where the arch over the doorway between Rooms 29 and 31 had to be reconstructed. In several places remnants of barrel vaults were merely preserved. They had to be reinforced with iron hooks (dia. 0.9 cm) attaching them to the walls. Similarly, the vertical fissures occurring in walls were treated. The high mud-brick walls with paintings in Rooms 29 and 31 were found to be in

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Żurawski, Faith-healing and commemoration in Late Christian Dongola [in:] *Akten d. 6. Internationalen Koptogenkongress Münster 1996*, in print; cf. *PAM VIII*, 1996 (1997), pp. 161, 167.

<sup>6</sup> In the inscription, Georgios is mentioned still as an archpresbyter and not a bishop, therefore the text could have been written in AD 1162 at the latest, considering that his episcopate lasted 50 years, and that he died in AD 1113. Cf. S. Jakobiński, Monastery of the Holy Trinity at Old Dongola [in:] *The Spirituality of Ancient Monasticism*, Kraków-Tyniec 1995, p. 40, and A. Łajtar, *ibidem*, pp. 51-55.

very bad condition in the lower parts (just above the paving) where the bricks had been washed out by water which had apparently stood there for some time, leaving practically only half of the original thickness of the wall. The preservation of the walls to their present height is due to a layer of compact mud that had filled the empty spaces. Immediate conservation consisted of a gradual reconstruction of the missing parts of the walls. All the reconstruction works employed original building material (mud-brick or red-brick and in the arches), or new red-brick (filling the missing parts in walls) bonded with a special mortar (mud and sand in equal proportions, mixed with a 10% dilution of gum Arabic. The same mortar but in liquid condition was used to fill the vertical fissures in the walls. Plaster was fastened to the walls with homogenous injections of 10% hydropropylcellulose (Klugel G) mixed with water and mud. Surface destruction of paints and whitewash resulting in peeling was treated with the same hydropropylcellulose but in a 15% solution diluted in ethanol. Painted surfaces were cleaned with 2% Liquid PH 11 (Contrad 2000), neutralized by later treatment of the surface with a 0.5% vinegar and, subsequently, with water. The entire painted wall surface was protected with a 2% dilution of resin (Movilith 50) in ethanol. Conservation measures also consisted of fastening to the wall small fragments of painted plaster in order to restore as much of the mural as possible. Fragments, the place of which in the composition could not be identified with precision, were gathered together on a special panel on the appropriate wall, below the mural. A new roof was built over the entire complex of Room 27, 29 and 31, supported on walls of new red-brick erected on top of existing ones to reach an uniform height of c. 4.5 m with the required sloping to the south and west. The roof was made the traditional way, as was the case in previous

seasons, i.e., a structure of iron pipes (dia 1.5 inches) supporting layers of palm-leaf ribs, waterproof canvas, and a mixture of dung with mud.